

Coronavirus: your role as the situation evolves

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School types: All · School phases: All

Find out what steps to take now to make sure you're providing full support to your headteacher. If you're calling an extraordinary board meeting, be equipped with questions to ask.

Be proactive in supporting your headteacher now and as things develop, and keep your governors up to date. The actions in this article are aimed at the **chair** – but as a governor in another role this will help you know what to expect.

Our associate education expert, Jane Owens, helped us to write this article.

Support your headteacher and ask critical questions

Check in on your headteacher to make sure they're ready for this unprecedented, fast-moving situation, and feel supported.

Ask:

- How are you feeling? Do you have the support you need?
- Have you had any support from your local authority?
- How are the pupils coping?
- What are the main messages coming back from staff?
- Have parents been contacting you? What are their main concerns and worries?
- Do you have a school plan in case the situation on coronavirus changes? Does this cover different scenarios?
- Do you think it would be appropriate to call an extraordinary board meeting? (read the section below on extraordinary meetings before you decide whether to call one)

If you're a local governing body in a multi academy trust, ask:

- Has the trust provided any guidance on the coronavirus?
- Do you know if there's a specific trust-wide approach to coronavirus? (E.g. the possibility of sharing staff across the trust in case some schools close and others remain open)
- Do you know what other schools in the trust have been doing?

We've got some other questions your governing board can ask school leaders at your next board meeting to find out how your school is responding or proposing to respond to the coronavirus – see the [last section of our other article](#).

Keep your board updated

Ease any potential worries by keeping everyone on your board up to date and on the same page.

After your chat(s) with the headteacher, send an email to your board summarising:

- What you spoke about
- The questions you raised
- What plans your school has in place in case the situation on coronavirus changes

Decide whether to call an extraordinary board meeting

Discuss with your headteacher whether it would be helpful to call an [extraordinary meeting](#). This might be where:

- You haven't already discussed the coronavirus, and
- You don't have a planned meeting ahead of your Easter break

Remember, if the situation deteriorates, you can call an extraordinary meeting [with less than 7 days' notice](#).

Make sure you ask your clerk to put coronavirus on the [agenda](#).

Questions to ask school leaders in the meeting

If we're forced to close:

- What plans do we have to make sure we can continue to provide education?
- Do we have existing platforms for sending out learning resources?
- What extra measures can we put in place to safeguard children?
- How will we support pupils on free school meals?

If the governors can't meet so soon

You could use [your power as chair to act in cases of urgency](#) (sometimes called 'chair's action') – but you should only do this as a last resort.

You'd need to ask the governing board if you can use this power to make decisions regarding coronavirus on the board's behalf.

For example, if you need to urgently approve or update the business continuity plan or a policy (such as a remote learning or school trip policy) then you could approve this quickly without needing the board's approval.

Plan for remote meetings

If your school has to close, you might have to conduct your [meetings online](#).

Make sure all your governors have access to conference calling facilities and that they know how to use them. If you're unsure how these work, lean on someone in your school (e.g. IT staff) to help you set it up.

The examples below all have **free** versions:

- [Google Hangouts Meet](#) – Google is making its video-conferencing feature free (see [here](#))
- [CyberLink U Meeting](#)
- [Zoom Meetings](#)
- [Lifesize](#)
- [Skype](#)
- [BlueJeans](#)

Note: The products listed in this section aren't exhaustive and aren't an endorsement by The Key.

Specific queries: contact the DfE's coronavirus helpline

The Department for Education (DfE) has set up a **coronavirus helpline**: 0800 046 8687.

It would be to answer any questions you might have.

Sources

Jane Owens is a chair of governors at primary, secondary and special schools, and chairs a multi-academy trust board. She is a national leader of governance and conducts external reviews of governance across all sectors.

Next steps

- [Meetings: remote attendance](#)
- [Coronavirus: latest government advice for your](#)